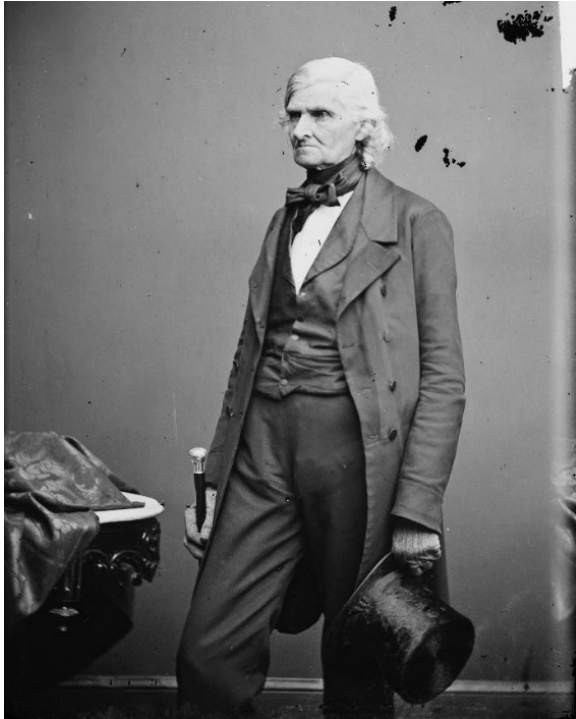


William Cranch

(17 Jul 1769 – 1 Sep 1855)

Cranch. In this city on Saturday, September 1, at 5 o'clock p.m. the Hon. William Cranch, Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia. The funeral will take place from his late residence, Capitol Hill, corner of East 2nd and South D streets on Tuesday at 4 o'clock p.m.



The National Intelligencer, September 3, 1855

Death of Judge Cranch

Our readers will learn, from the notices to be found in another part of our paper, that this eminent citizen died at his residence, in this city, on Saturday evening. He was one of the oldest residents of the Federal city, having removed here with his family from Massachusetts in 1796 or 1797, three or four years before the Government was transferred from Philadelphia. It will be seen that a meeting of the Bar of Washington has been called for this morning, at which, no doubt, some one of its members will make a suitable address, in which occasion will be taken to speak of the prominent incidents of his life. We shall, therefore, only add here that, as a private citizen, friend, and neighbor, there never lived a more upright, honest man than Judge Cranch.

The National Intelligencer, September 4, 1855

At a meeting of the Members of the Bar of the District of Columbia and of the officers of the Courts in said District, held pursuant to notice in the court room in the City Hall in the city of Washington on Monday, the 3d day of September, 1855 -- John Marbury, Esq. was called to the chair and John A. Smith appointed Secretary.

Richard S. Coxe, Esq. rose and stated that the meeting had assembled in consequences of an event which, though long anticipated had struck them with surprise. They had met to commemorate the life, virtues, and character of their deceased brother, the Honorable William Cranch, Chief Judge of the Circuit Court and Judge of the District Court of the District of Columbia, who died at his residence in this city on Saturday last.

Judge Cranch died (said Mr. C.) at about the age of eighty-six years, after having lived thus long as an individual, and having presided on the bench a longer period of time than he had ever heard of in a judicial officer. He was appointed a Judge of the Circuit Court in March, 1801, fifty-four years since. He has now left us, and the place made vacant by his death is to be supplied; but he might say that a long time would elapse before that place could be supplied with so acceptable a gentleman and one possessing so much ability.

Judge Cranch was a native of Massachusetts, and came to this city, he believed, in the year 1795 or 1796. He at once engaged in a great deal of active business, and obtained high respect for his talents. Having been appointed, in 1801, the junior Judge of the Circuit Court, he was subsequently elevated to

the position of Chief Justice of that Court, and was likewise the Judge of the District Court. All who knew him in the course of their practice in the Courts knew how well and admirably he fulfilled all of the duties with which he was entrusted. Few Judges ever excelled him; few ever equaled him in all the essentials which go to constitute the character of a great Judge. He was eminent for learning in all the departments of law -- admiralty, chancery, criminal, and common -- and was thoroughly imbued with the learning of the profession from the earliest days.

With regard to his personal character no imputation ever rested upon it, for his integrity was never impugned. His faithfulness, his impartiality; his urbanity of manner toward those who practiced in the courts over which he presided; his uncommon industry in preparing and pronouncing judgment after argument had been closed -- in all these he stood pre-eminent; and, although they had known judges possessing a larger extent of inquiry, he possessed that necessary degree of inquiry which qualified him most admirably for the duties which devolved upon him.

We have met (said Mr. C.) with a great loss; but, thank God! He has left a bright example. We trust that every young man, while he reverences, will follow him -- will imitate Judge Cranch in industry, and endeavor to equal him in learning; be pure of heart as he was pure honorable as he was honorable; so as to leave as pure and eminent a character for the admiration of his countrymen.

With the views thus thrown out, and satisfied that he should have the hearty acquiescence of the gentlemen present, Mr. C. offered the following resolution:

Resolved, That a committee of five members of the meeting be appointed by the Chair to draft appropriate resolutions on the subject which has thus convened us together.

The CHAIR appointed Richard S. Coxe, Wm. Redin, Joseph H. Bradley, James M. Carlisle, and John F. Ennis, Esqrs. To compose the committee, who, having retired for the purpose, subsequently returned, and, by their chairman, Mr. Coxe, presented the following resolutions:

1. Resolved, That during the whole course of the private life of the deceased in this vicinity, extending beyond sixty years, he had eminently entitled himself to possess, what he fully enjoyed, the unqualified admiration and esteem of our whole community.
2. Resolved, That as Reporter of the Decisions of the Supreme Court and as a Judge of the Circuit Court, on the bench of which he occupied a seat for upwards of fifty-four years, he was distinguished for his acquirements in all the different branches of professional learning, for, untiring industry, for indefatigable diligence in the discharge of his high duties, for his kind and courteous amenity of deportment towards all with whom he had intercourse, for dignified, patient, and impartial treatment towards his colleagues and the members of the Bar.
3. Resolved, That we deeply deplore the loss which the community, the profession, and we ourselves more especially, have sustained in the death of Judge Cranch.
4. Resolved, That, in the manifestation of the high esteem and respect we entertained for the deceased, we will wear the customary badge of mourning for the period of thirty days, and will, as a body, attend his funeral.
5. Resolved, That we will undertake, with the consent and approbation of the family, to erect a substantial and appropriate monument over the grave of the deceased in commemoration of his character; and that the chairman of this meeting, Mr. Redin, and Mr. Carlisle be a committee to carry this resolution into effect.
6. Resolved, That the chairman communicate a copy of these proceedings to the family of the departed, with an expression of our condolence with them in the loss they have sustained.
7. Resolved, That at the next meeting of the Circuit Court the chairman be requested to present a copy to the Court, with a request that the same may be entered upon the minutes of the Court.
8. Resolved, That copies of these proceedings be handed to the various newspapers in this District for publication.

The resolutions, having been seconded by Mr. Carlisle with appropriate remarks, were unanimously adopted; and the meeting adjourned

At a meeting of the Levy Court of Washington county, held at the City Hall in Georgetown on Monday, September 3, the following resolutions were submitted by Dr. Henry Haw, and were unanimously adopted:

1. Resolved, That the members of this Court have heard with profound regret of the demise of William Cranch, late Chief Justice of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia.
2. Resolved, That in his death the Judiciary has lost one who, by his integrity, zeal, uprightness, and purity of character, has added a lustre to the whiteness of the judicial ermine. For more than half a century he held the scales of justice with a steady hand, and, knowing no man in a cause, had dispensed only the equal law of the land with firmness, tempered by urbanity.
3. Resolved, That, out of respect to the memory of the deceased, the members of the Levy Court of Washington county will attend the funeral of the deceased, and that we will wear the usual badge of mourning.
4. Resolved, That these resolutions be published in the city papers, and a copy be communicated by the Clerk of this Court to the family of the deceased, together with the expression of our individual sympathy in their great bereavement, and that the Court now adjourn.

The National Intelligencer, September 5, 1855

The Funeral of the lamented Judge Cranch took place yesterday afternoon. It was attended by the President of the United States and other distinguished officers of the General Government, by the Bench and Bar of our several Courts, and by a very large number of citizens and friends. The religious services of the occasion were conducted by the Rev. William Furness, of the Unitarian Church, Philadelphia, whose address on the occasion was appropriate, eloquent, and impressive.

The Evening Star, September 4, 1855

The Funeral of Judge Cranch took place yesterday afternoon, from his late residence on Capitol Hill. A large number of citizens were in attendance on the exercises including the bench and the bar of the several courts, the President of the United States, Hon. Caleb Cushing, the Attorney General, and the Hon. Erastus Brooks, a son-in-law of the deceased. The address of the Rev. William Furnace, of the Unitarian church, Philadelphia, was appropriate, eloquent, and impressive.

The following named gentlemen acted as pall-bearers: Messrs. James Adams, R.C. Weightman, R.S. Coxe, James M. Carlisle, William Redin, and John Marbury.

On the conclusion of the funeral services, many of the persons present approached to take a parting look at the remains of the pure and upright judge; and we were thus privileged among the number. As in life the countenance of the deceased was serene, irradiated with intelligence and benevolence, so in death he lay as if in peaceful slumber--no distortion of the nerves; no repulsiveness such as frequently induces the spectator to hurry from the scene. Conscious of an honorable, virtuous life, the grave had, doubtless, no terrors for him; and hence with calmness he sunk into the eternal rest.

Mr. Anthony Buchly, the undertaker, superintended the funeral, in his usually polite but prompt manner; having made careful preparations for that duty. The coffin, it may here be observed, is mahogany, covered with fine black cloth, the studs and handles, of silver. The breastplate, of the same material, bore the inscription: "William Cranch; born July 17 1769; died September 1, 1855." The interior of the coffin was neatly lined with folds of white satin.

The funeral cortege was large, and the remains were conveyed to the Congressional Cemetery, where they were deposited in the family vault.

The Evening Star, October 22, 1855

Circuit Court—

The time was occupied today by the calling over of the docket and arranging the cases for trial. The room has been shrouded in the emblems of mourning, as a mark of respect to the memory of the late Chief Justice Cranch. A portrait of the deceased, painted by his son, has been placed on the wall. It is a good likeness, and much admired for its truthfulness. There could not be a more appropriate ornament to that tribunal.

Notes:

- Administered the oath of office to Vice President Fillmore, at the death of President Taylor (1850)
- Presided over the Anne Royall Trial.
- 1828 - First President of the Washington City Temperance Society
- Nephew of President John Adams and Cousin of President John Quincy Adams.

The Evening Star, May 2, 1905, p. 16

No Skeleton in the Cranch House

To the Editor of The Star:

Someone sent me a clipping from your valuable paper of a recent date telling of an articulated skeleton alleged to have been found in demolishing an old residence on Delaware avenue, formerly occupied by the late Judge Cranch, supreme justice of the district from 1805 to 1856.

As a former "cave dweller" in that particular cave in 1854 and 1855, I claim to know something of the matter, both from observation and family history, and I am certain that no one ever occupied any part of the house at any time with my grandfather, Judge Cranch, for his own family fully took up all the available room. Possibly the skeleton was found in the house adjoining his, for The Star says it was found in the "house next door to the Casualty Hospital," and the house occupied up to 1855 by Judge Cranch was, at the time of its demolition, the Casualty Hospital itself. The first house in the block with a garden lot on the corner was the Cranch residence (the old knocker of which is on my house in Erie); the next house was occupied, I believe, by John Hitz, father of the present John Hitz of the Volta bureau; the next one was occupied for many years by Carroll Brent, his sister, Mrs. Chilton, and his mother. But, if there were any skeletons around, they never came to the knowledge of Judge Cranch or any member of his family.

EDWARD CRANCH

Erie, Pa.